The Force Awakens vs. The Prequels, or: So this is how personal expression dies, to thunderous applause

January 7th, 2016 | by rickworley
Posted In: Blogs

http://www.rickworley.com/2016/01/07/the-force-awakens-vs-the-prequels-or-so-this-is-how-personal-expression-dies-to-thunderous-applause/

Spoilers for all seven Star Wars films

1- The Auteur Theory

"The auteur theory of film actually is very true if you know directors, because they are very much like their movies. And in the case of somebody who writes and directs, you know, it is my life. I mean, everything I write is my life, I'm not writing some sort of hypothetical thesis on something, I'm writing a story that I have to get extremely emotionally involved in because it's going to take two or three years of my life to do it. So I can't just sort of say, 'Oh this will be fun,' and knock it off in a week. This is like a marriage … you have to be in love with this thing for at least four or five years, and probably for the rest of your life" –George Lucas [1]

In the run up to *The Force Awakens*, I couldn't even begin to count how many times I've seen people saying, Oh thank God that George Lucas won't be involved.

It's been a popular notion for some time now that Star Wars needed to be saved from George Lucas. It took me a long time to work out how people could seriously think something so nonsensical.

There is no Star Wars without George Lucas. Where do these people think that Star Wars came from?

To get around the conundrum of loving Star Wars but hating George Lucas, fans have created entire alternate realities. *The Secret History of Star Wars* is a book-length attempt by fan/possible mental patient Michael Kaminski to give credit for everything good about the original three films to somebody, anybody, besides George Lucas. It was Ralph McQuarrie, Gary Kurtz, it was Lawrence Kasdan, Irvin Kersher, Marcia Lucas, it was maybe the craft service guy, but it was most definitely not the guy who wrote, directed, and originated the entire thing. Kaminski makes baroque conspiracy theories about how Lucas has lied about the development of all of the films, based on the fact that Kaminski has "uncovered" that the story did in fact evolve over the different script drafts and didn't originate fully formed in the version that Lucas has chosen to finally present. The way that fans are able to twist reality to fit their preferred version of events is displayed in fact that he presents these revelations as "secret" when he has no special access of any kind and all of his research is based on information readily made available by Lucas and Lucasfilm themselves.

Almost all those other contributors I mentioned did in fact make important contributions to Star Wars, but to say that their contributions negate Lucas', or that it means that these films are not Lucas' creations, simply displays a basic ignorance of how art is created.

Everything about Star Wars- The love of fast cars, the Saturday matinee influences, the Kurosawa influences, the Joseph Campbell influences, the daddy issues, the editing style, all of it- this is George Lucas' life on screen. Star Wars is what happens when you take his life experiences, things that he absorbed and that inspired him, and throw them in a pot together. The stew that happens is Star Wars.

This is how any work of art happens, really. Film is of course an especially collaborative medium, but in any work of art, even a novel, every person that enters the artist's life directly or indirectly has an effect on the person that they are and the life experiences they are drawing upon to create their art. This does not mean that the novel doesn't have an author. Those other people are influences, but the artist is the final arbiter, the lens through which those experiences are combined into a piece of art.

I was 16 when *The Phantom Menace* came out, at the right age to be a big Star Wars fan and also at a very impressionable age in my own development as an artist, so the critical reception that that movie- and later the next two prequels- received was a subject of continuing fascination for me. Now, seeing the inverse of that extreme emotional reaction applied to *The Force Awakens* has been fascinating to watch also.

For me, the entire reason that I had a big interest in the prequels was George Lucas. There actually isn't any comparable situation in film history where one man got to originate a story and, on this scale and with this kind of budget and over 30 years, do it all his way without ceding control at any point. This is the only time ever that a project like this could really be said to have one author creating it. That was what interested me, to see what he would do.

Not all Star Wars fans feel that way, obviously. They've even created a feature-length documentary, *The People vs. George Lucas*, to present their case, without any apparent irony, that Lucas should be held accountable to them, and that he owes it to the fans to make the movies he is told to make. If you'd like to see a long parade of people who have never created anything in their lives talk about how they know more about making movies than the guy who made movies they are obsessed with does, then go ahead and check it out, but I'm not responsible for the headache it could create.

Alan Moore said, "If the audience knew what they needed, then they wouldn't be the audience, they would be the artists." I go to see a film or a piece of art because I want the artist to show me something new, something I wouldn't have thought of on my own. Were the prequels the way that I would have made them? Of course not. And it would have been totally boring if they were. If I wanted to see fan fiction, I would have written some fan fiction.

I wanted to see what George Lucas would come up with. Somehow petty, irrational hatred toward the man has become the accepted tone of the conversation online over the last 16 years, and somehow people forgot that Lucas is a genius. *THX-1138*, *American Graffiti*, and *Star Wars*,

in the span of a few short years. Not only are these all radically different films and all brilliant, they were also all bolts from the blue that showed entire new directions in which the medium of film could go. There wasn't anything like any of them, and he did it three times in a row.

2- The White House

"The point is, like if you paint your house white and somebody comes over, 'Well that should be a green house.' Well, fine, but I wanted to paint it white. I don't think there was anything wrong with painting it white. I don't think there's anything wrong with me for painting it white. Maybe it should be a green house, but I didn't want it to be a green house. I wanted it to be a white house" –George Lucas [2]

I don't think I've ever seen a negative review of the Star wars prequels that talks about the movies that George Lucas actually made, as opposed to talking about the movies that the reviewer was wishing had been made.

People have a hard time wrapping their heads around how very fucking weird *Star Wars* was when it was first released, because now we watch it from childhood and internalize it. Not only *Star Wars* itself, but the thirty years of films since that have copied and emulated it. So, it seems like the most natural thing in the world- this is what adventure movies should be like.

Except that that's contrary to the entire reason it was a success in the first place, that it did everything different. So, when the prequels came along and they were strange, experimental, not what people expect blockbusters to be, that of course couldn't be more Star Wars of them. The irony is lost on fans of the first Star Wars that they are deriding the new Star Wars for being what Star Wars has been all along. Lucas didn't change, they did.

They also have rose tinted nostalgia that comes from loving something uncritically as a child. If you think that the acting and dialog in the first trilogy was across the board realistic and somehow different than it was in the prequels, then you're operating in a version of reality so altered by your perceptions that I probably can't help you.

When you judge a piece of art, the criteria you're supposed to use is how closely the artist achieved their goals. If you don't like musicals, that's fine. That doesn't mean that all musicals are bad. They could be a very well done example of something that you don't enjoy. There's a fine line there many people struggle to understand, which is the difference between talking about the piece of art, and talking about yourself and your own tastes and emotions.

George Lucas isn't interested in traditional story structure. This should be obvious if you've seen *THX* or *American Graffiti*. In fact, he's actively interested in subverting traditional story structure, and in completely non-narrative films.

But in spite of that, you get things like the Red Letter Media reviews, which point out that *Phantom Menace* doesn't have a clear protagonist and then sit back triumphantly, having just

mathematically proven that they're right and George Lucas doesn't know how to make movies. This is the type of critique you get from armchair critics who have maybe read a "How to write your screenplay in 30 days!" book for hacks, and now think that if they spot something in a film that doesn't follow that formula precisely, they have discovered a mistake. The Red Letter Media reviews continually mention things that George Lucas went to great lengths to do and wants you to notice- non-traditional narrative structure, visual synchronicities- and point them out as though they are very clever for noticing them and these things are in the movie simply because Lucas is too stupid and lazy to notice them also. These reviews are feature-length illustrations of the Dunning-Kruger effect- people who understand something so shallowly that they think they are experts. These are reviews written for an audience operating at a level where they can't process a detailed analysis without periodic jokes about murdering hookers thrown in there to spice it up, and, obviously, many Star Wars fans love them.

The prequels are also of course criticized for their dialog. George Lucas doesn't care about dialog. He has said this so many times in interviews over the years, I don't even know where to start pointing to examples. He refers to dialog as a sound effect, and he's said he prefers the French dubbed version of the films because it's just a better sound, whether or not you know what the words mean. He's pointed out with pride that children in foreign countries who don't speak any English can watch Star Wars and understand it based on the visuals and the music.

When you go to Star Wars and complain that the dialog isn't realistic, that's like going to *Schindler's List* and complaining that it wasn't funny enough, you were in the mood for a comedy. It's just not the movie you went to, and again, you're talking about yourself and your own taste and comfort levels, not the movie you saw. You're watching an apple and complaining that it's not an orange. It's not a problem with the movie, it's a problem with how you're discussing the movie.

What George Lucas cares about is "pure cinema" or what he calls "tone poems". Again, he has said this over and over in every interview where he has got a chance. What he's referring to is the ability of cinema to create meaning and emotions with editing and the juxtaposition of different images.

And if you're able to watch Star Wars that way, which is to say the way that you're supposed to watch it, then the six episodes George Lucas made really are an extraordinary achievement.

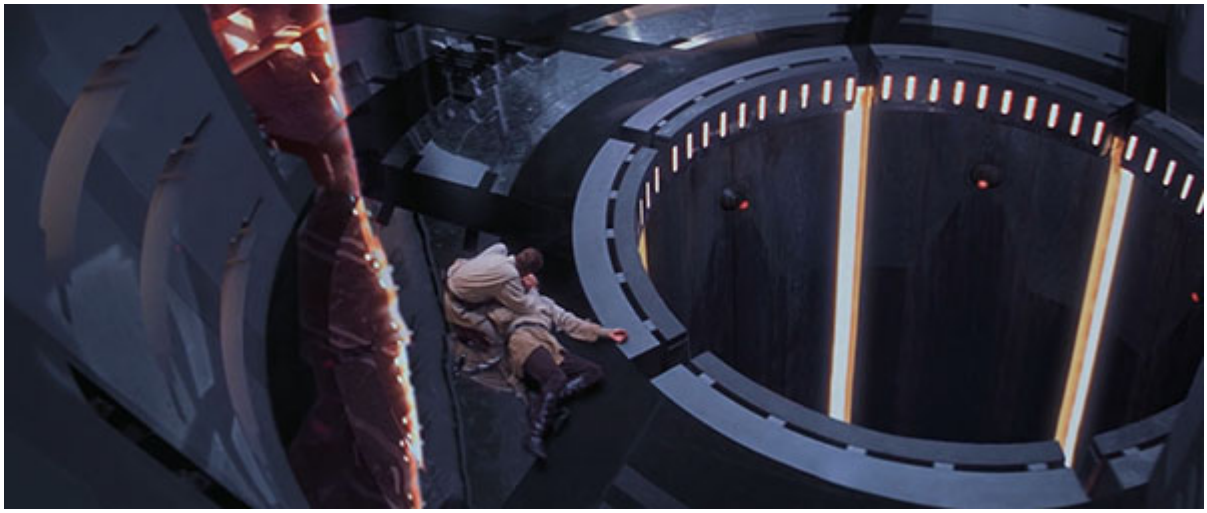
His interests are very obvious in *THX*, but they're also there in *American Graffiti*, which doesn't actually have a plot- it has a series of vignettes, and it worked for people because the vignettes are fun and comic and strung together by entertaining music, so audiences didn't quite realize what a strange film they'd got. It was further hidden in Star Wars, because the first films had a very archetypal hero's journey on which to hang the viewer's attention, but his interests are as present there as anywhere else.

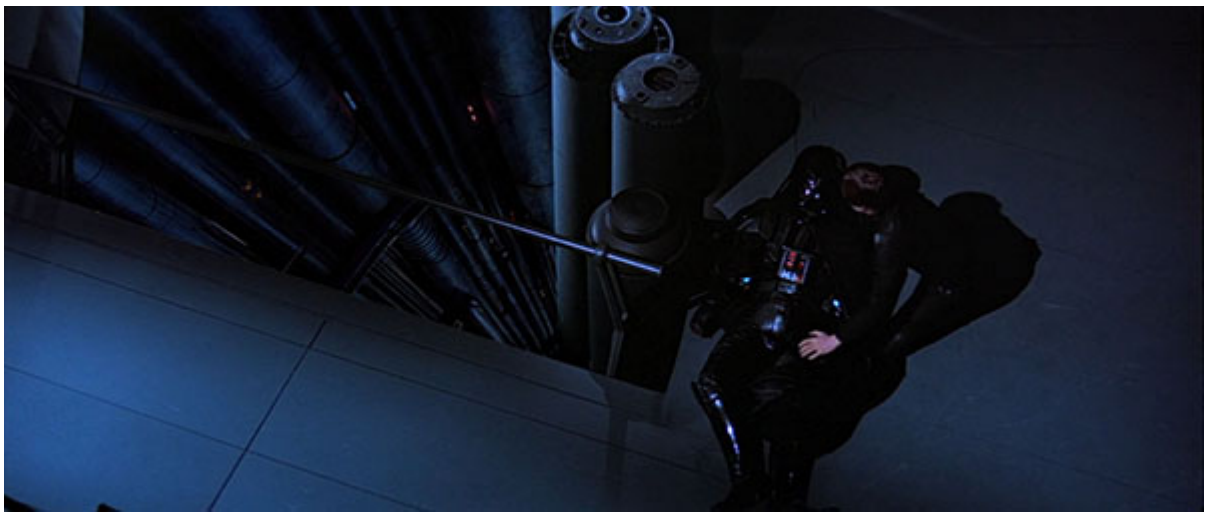
Mike Kilmo with his **Ring Theory essay** has gone into much more detail about visual synchronicities throughout the films than I will here, but even with his essay's popularity, I feel like to explain my thoughts on *The Force Awakens*, this is something I have to go into.

I don't agree with every detail of Kilmo's theory, but as for his observations of patterns within the films, it's undeniable that they are there, and also undeniable that they are intentional. When Kilmo's essay started to go viral over the last year, I was kind of shocked. Shocked that people were surprised by this. This was news? Again, many details of his theory and many observations that he made are new and very insightful, but the general idea that Star Wars was a visual poem, that the episodes echoed each other, etc… How can you find out anything about Star Wars and not know this already? How did people not know already that this was how you were supposed to view Star Wars?

When I first saw *Phantom Menace*, I immediately noticed a huge number of shots at the end that paralleled the endings of both *A New Hope* and *Return of the Jedi*. I'm not patting myself on the back for this or saying that it was extraordinary of me to notice it- I thought it was what everybody was supposed to be seeing. It's not as though it's a secret. Again, Lucas mentions this in interviews every chance he gets. He is constantly talking about how the movies are meant to operate on a visual level, and how they are meant to mirror each other.

In the end of *Phantom Menace*, the first ones you'll probably notice are Qui-Gon in his funeral pyre, which is a mirror image of Darth Vader when he is later in his, and Obi-Wan holding Qui-Gon's body, which is a bookend to Luke later holding the body of his father.





These aren't merely just visually similar moments. They are carefully composed- in fact, the whole scenes in which they appear had to be carefully staged so that the key moments could be composed- in a direct symmetrical reflection of the earlier shots that Lucas wanted to quote.

What is this point of this? Kilmo has his Ring Theory which describes structural reasons for the patterns. I've always thought of it more in musical terms, because that's how Lucas describes it. He describes these moments as the same melody or theme, but played on different instruments. And what is the purpose of it when a particular melody is reprised in an opera, but given a different interpretation? To compare and contrast the two different moments, to mark the differences and create subtextual meaning.

In the case of these particular moments, he is creating bookends for the story of the entire saga. First, the murder of Qui-Gon by a Sith, which is what leads to Obi-Wan training Anakin and all the misfortune that follows, and this is inverted by Vader's eventual sacrifice where he is able to turn back to Anakin again, and he dies himself. Pulling these two moments together by making these shots direct quotations of one another tells the story of the entire saga in miniature, and it's beautiful to see.

Some people, of course, will claim that these are just a few similar shots, and ideas of this being a vast symphonic idea that goes throughout the whole series are just people reading too much into it, giving Lucas too much credit. These people are categorically incorrect.

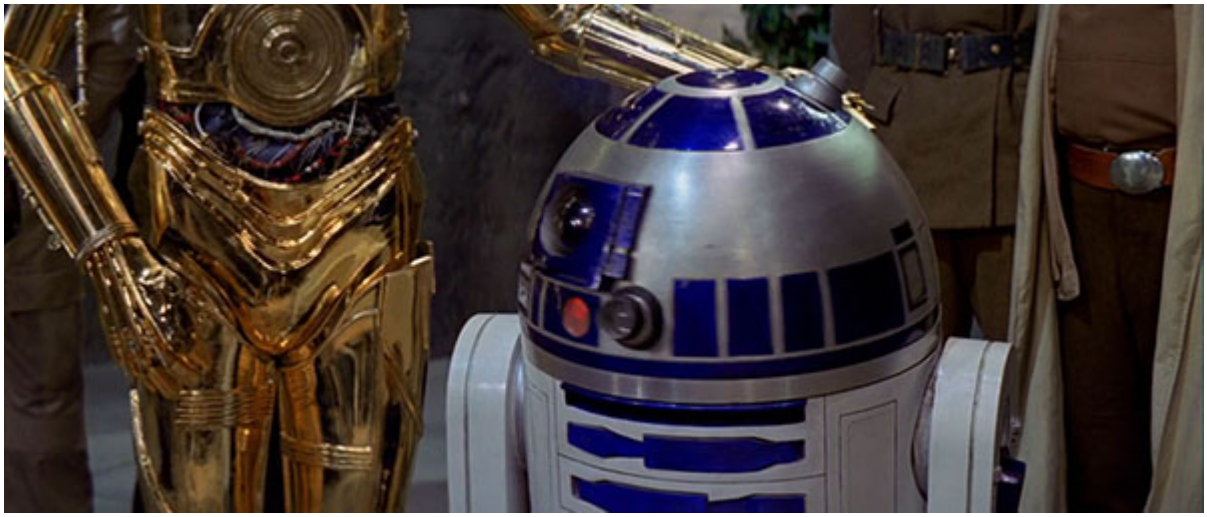
Look at, for one example, the similarities between the parade at the end of *Phantom Menace* and the awards ceremony at the end of *A New Hope*. Everything is staged in such a way to create exact symmetrical moments between each shot of characters that recur between the two scenes and characters within the two scenes that are meant to symbolically echo each other.

First we have a shot of Padme looking downward and smiling, which is exactly followed by a shot of Leia looking downward and smiling.

In these two shots, the characters are both looking to the left of the frame, only in the first one it is Padme looking at Anakin. In the next shot, Leia is in the same position and looks in the same direction, only in the following shot, Anakin has been replaced by Luke.

Luke is now on the start of his journey, as Anakin was in the previous scene. Is Luke going to emulate Anakin, or is he going to succeed where Anakin failed? They even have a similar looking smirk on their face, having both just successfully blown up a space station. Leia and Padme looking in the same direction emphasizes the similarities in what they are both looking at, but Anakin and Luke in their shots are looking at opposite sides of the screen, again creating the symmetry or bookends between the moments.

Then we have a reaction shot from Artoo, who is present at the start of each of these journeys. Lucas has said that, really, it's all Artoo's story, and he's the witness to it all, so it's important to have a shot of him observing each occasion. In each shot his head turns, but in opposite directions, making the moments symmetrical again.



Whether or not you find it interesting or rewarding, if you choose to look into it even slightly it's obvious that Lucas has gone to extreme measures to do this throughout the entire saga to a minute level of detail.

Beyond specific shots, it happens in the tone of the scenes. The *Phantom Menace* celebration on Naboo is a parade, there are children playing and confetti. The similar scene in A New Hope again features our heroes that we should be rooting for, but it has a much more militaristic flavor. Specifically, it has direct echoes of Leni Riefenstahl and *Triumph of the Will*.

Nazi imagery has always featured in Star Wars, but mainly in conjunction with the bad guys obviously. Yet Lucas quotes that movie in the Rebel celebration in *A New Hope*. Was there intended ambiguity in that choice? If there wasn't originally, there is a meaning to it created by the juxtaposition with the scene from *Phantom Menace*. The heroes in *Phantom Menace* are living in a different time, and their celebrations look different. By *A New Hope*, the Republic, who were the heroes originally, have now taken on the role of the Empire, and the heroes, while momentarily victorious, are now in hiding and living a military life of constant warfare.

This is another problem people had with the prequels- they were watching them in the wrong order.

Many many things in the prequels were expressly designed to work best if they're watched as they're numbered- as the first episodes of the series.

The first half hour of *Phantom Menace,* for example, is mostly devoted to showing you what a Jedi is and what they do, what powers they have, how a lightsaber works, etc. Of course, if you were coming to this movie having already memorized the others, you didn't need to know any of that.

There are numerous things like this throughout the prequels that would have been befuddling if you were insisting on watching it as the second trilogy, rather than trying to understand that it was supposed to be the first. Threepio being made by Anakin seems like a big coincidence if you go backward, but watching them in order there is no coincidence, the two characters started out connected and later diverged, rather than starting far apart and then being brought together arbitrarily.

Likewise, it might seem odd that out of all the Wookiees in the galaxy, Yoda happens to be friends with Chewbacca, but going the other way, not only does it make sense, it makes more sense than before. Out of the whole cantina, how does Obi-Wan manage to walk up to a qualified co-pilot with a suitable ship on his first try? Because he knew Chewbacca, Chewie had helped the Jedi 20 years earlier! Not only is it not a mistake, it adds a layer and improves things in the original films.

Another reason people have trouble viewing it this way is the idea that the originals will be spoiled if you see the prequels first. Mainly, the idea that the "I am your father" revelation will be ruined. Again, this is people clinging to the way they originally saw the films and what they want the films to be emotionally, rather than trying to understand the films George Lucas actually made. Because if you can make the effort to look at it that way, you would realize that, actually, it's a much greater surprise to go along in the whole prequel trilogy thinking that Anakin and Obi-Wan are the heroes, and then have Anakin turn and become a Sith. That's a far bigger and far more consequential twist.

It also happens to make the moment in *Empire Strikes Back* better, because we have now seen Anakin turn, and we know the movies can go there, so you wonder if it actually is possible that Luke will go there too. As a kid, I never really bought that Luke could turn to the Dark Side- he was the good guy! Wasn't gonna happen! However, viewed the other way, it already DID happen, it certainly could happen again.

I grew up with the original movies before I saw the prequels, too, and so I understand that it's a difficult adjustment to make. But that's the way Lucas made it, because that's what the movie was. He wanted the six films to work together as a piece, rather than just doing what would be more easily accessible to a certain group of fans who had grown up with the other three films first. And he was right, because he knew that eventually, if the films lasted and new generations

kept watching them, that first generation would be in the minority, and it didn't make any sense to compromise how the films worked for every other generation to please that first one.

And the thing is, it's always more rewarding to try to understand the piece of art that's in front of you, rather than only understanding your own predispositions. When the prequels were coming out, it was a fascinating puzzle to me, and I was watching very closely how the structures of the two halves would tie together. Before *Episode II* came out, I predicted to my friends that it would end with a shot of Anakin and Padme's wedding. I predicted too, also in 1999, that *Episode III* would end with the arrival of the twins in their new homes, the last shot being Luke with Owen and Beru on Tatooine. I even predicted that the first shot of *Episode II* would contain a camera tilt up to a planet, rather than a tilt down. Every other episode started with a tilt down, but once Lucas had a rule like that, there was always one exception as a counterpoint. I could see the musical structure to it, and enjoy what he was doing, rather than bitching because he wasn't doing what I wanted him to.

Again, I'm not patting myself for noticing or predicting these things, and I don't think it's extraordinary to notice them. These are not small, hidden Easter eggs- they are the entire language with which Lucas is trying to communicate. And it's not just a matter of visual quotes and similar compositions in particular shots. It's intrinsic to everything about the movies.

To use one example- the three villains of the prequels, Darth Maul, Count Dooku, and General Grievous. They are all precursors to Vader. Darth Maul shows you the power and ferocity of the Sith, Count Dooku sets up the idea that an intelligent Jedi can turn to the Dark Side, and General Grievous shows us a villain whose body has been destroyed, and who is now more machine than man. These are establishing the ideas in the universe necessary to understand so that when Anakin is transformed at the end of *Episode III*, it makes sense within the rules of the films and it has been foreshadowed. Otherwise, Anakin turning like he did and becoming a machine like he does would be too large of a leap for people watching the films chronologically.

These echoes and similarities between the stories and visual symbols Lucas is using are where almost all of his creative energy was directed, and many people watching the films don't pay any attention to them. It's pervasive, in every scene and idea of the films. To claim that it is all accidental and that Lucas wasn't thinking in these terms is absurd. In the prequels, people got three vastly more weird, esoteric, and ambitious movies than they expected, and many of them just couldn't be bothered.

The one problem with talking about how the films operate on these abstract, visual levels is that they're also meant to be kid's films. People would point to this as another failure, but I think it's the most impressive thing of all. It's a small miracle that these films operate on all those other levels, and are also completely enjoyable to a child. Whether or not they understand it in a way they can articulate, the fact that so much of the meaning of the films rests in the visuals rather than the dialog makes it easier for children to understand what they're about.

I've been told many times on the internet that the prequels are "objectively bad" and "universally" hated. Which is strange because they were all extraordinary financial successes and, to reference Mike Kilmo again, **they were also critically as well received as the original**

series. And kids that grew up with them as their first Star Wars like them as much or even more than the original films.

People say, how can you call them children's films when they're full of long discussions about trade routes and taxation and politics? The thing is, I have never heard a child complain about those scenes in *Phantom Menace*- I have only heard adults claiming that children don't like them. The longest scene in the senate in the prequels- aside from a lightsaber fight between Yoda and Palpatine- is barely over two minutes, and kids react to all the political talk the way they react to anything they don't entirely understand- they gloss over it. Just exactly how when I was a kid watching *A New Hope* I glossed over discussions of diplomatic missions to Alderaan and the bureaucracy of the Imperial Senate. I didn't know what any of that meant, and it didn't matter because the story was told to me visually. You could tell who the bad guys were, you could tell when they were doing something that created a bad situation for the good guys.

Kids love the prequels. Kids even love Jar Jar. At the *Phantom Menace* reissue in 2012, I sat in the theater in front of a six year old that was patiently explaining the movie to his dad, although I'm pretty sure the dad was already a Star Wars fan. When Darth Maul first appeared, the kid gasped and then whispered to his dad, "That's Darth Maul- He's BAD." When they arrived at the Jedi Temple for the first time, he said reverentially, "That's MASTER Yoda…" And, when Jar Jar first showed up, the kid immediately giggled with excitement and then said, "That's Jar Jar, Dad- He's FUNNY." Jar Jar is an audience proxy character for children, he covers his eyes when something scary is happening, he's confused and overwhelmed by the big events around him, as children would be. And I think in that function, which is his intended function, he is undeniably a success.

3- Who Shot First

"If criticism were the kind of analysis it was meant to be in the first place – as it is in other arts, where you have literate, sophisticated people, who are knowledgeable – then it would be worthwhile to listen to it. To have them rant and rave about their personal feelings is a waste of my time," –George Lucas [3]

Let's talk about midi-chlorians, shall we? Because that's the perfect example of the problem with how fans view the films. For one thing, the vast majority of the people I've talked to about it simply don't even understand what they are. They are NOT a "scientific" explanation for the force. They do NOT remove anything mystical about the films. Midi-cholorians are NOT the Force. They are a lifeform that communicates with the Force, they are one link in the chain, one of many creatures that the Force affects, and simply Lucas' way of saying that the Force- the same mystical energy field it has been in all the movies- affects everything, and that living creatures are all in symbiotic relationships with each other.

They also don't determine the path a character is to take. They talk to the character, they give the character information, but it is still up to the person what to do with that information, whether to be a hero or a villain. The Force has always had a hereditary aspect to a degree- as Luke tells

Leia, the Force is strong in their family, and you do have to be born with a predisposition. I think it's obvious in the original films that if Han decided to train hard enough, he could not become a Jedi. It was a mixture of nature and nurture- characters were born with certain abilities, and then decided what to do with them.

But still, when midi-chlorians were mentioned in the prequels, people said that Lucas had changed things, that he had ruined something that was special to them.

The interesting fact is that, actually, midi-cholrians have always been part of Star Wars.

They were there in the original treatments Lucas was writing in 1975, with the same name and everything else. Along with many other details of the universe and backstory he was creating with his scripts, they didn't make it into those first three films. For Lucas, though, this was always part of his story. He didn't change anything. It's just the fans assumed they knew what he was thinking, which of course they didn't. Which is the entire reason the series has had a continued fascination for me- because I'm actually finding out the next piece of this world and this piece of art, rather than having something new grafted onto something that was already finished and complete.

It's a strange phenomenon wherein the fans at some point decide that they now own a piece of art, and that they know more about it than the person who made it. At some point, with the Special Editions, Star Wars fans came to the conclusion that they could now say George Lucas no longer had a right to final cut of his own films.

They'll say this is about preserving film history, which is blatantly false. For one thing, there is no single, original version of A New Hope to preserve. Even in its original release, the first film had different sound mixes for different venues with changes between them as major as a completely different voice actress for Aunt Beru. And of course as early as 1981, the film was changed again when its episode number and "A New Hope" were added to the opening crawl.

If it had just been the "A New Hope" addition, would people be talking as though there is some moral obligation for a filmmaker to never alter a film after its initial release? That's a fantasy. Filmmakers alter films after they're released all the time and for all different reasons. There is not an invisible line in the sand where a film becomes sacrosanct and it is never permissible to touch it again.

Campaigners for the "unaltered" versions of the first three movies are fond of using this quote from Lucas:

"People who alter or destroy works of art and our cultural heritage for profit or as an exercise of power are barbarians, and if the laws of the United States continue to condone this behavior, history will surely classify us as a barbaric society." [4]

It almost makes him sound like a hypocrite, if you completely ignore the context and the point he was making. He was talking about corporations colorizing and altering their old catalogue of

movies after the filmmakers have died and without their consent. They don't use this quote, from the same speech by Lucas:

"American law does not protect our painters, sculptors, recording artists, authors, or filmmakers from having their lifework distorted, and their reputation ruined. If something is not done now to clearly state the moral rights of artists, current and future technologies will alter, mutilate, and destroy for future generations the subtle human truths and highest human feeling that talented individuals within our society have created." [4]

Even more specifically, Lucas said to Wired magazine in 1999:

"Everybody signs on to bring forth the director's vision- that's part of the way movies are made and always have been. The real issue is whether a corporation that buys the film 10 years later has the right to change it. My response continues to be no." [5]

His concern was, and always has been, that the artist behind a film have their intentions and vision honored, which is why using this quote to talk about how he SHOULDN'T be able to alter his own movies is fairly idiotic.

The next line that people use is that it's disrespectful to the artists who worked on the movies to alter their work. This idea is even dumber of course. As Lucas said, the artists who work on a movie sign on to bring forth the vision of the director. He has the final say in what to use and not use. Claiming that he has some sort of obligation to the artists to leave their work as it was is the same as saying that he has an obligation to the actors to present every take of their performance in the final cut. It's just nonsensical.

They'll point out that Lucas wasn't the director of episodes V and VI… which just illustrates a lack of knowledge of how those films were made. The directors contributed, especially Kershner, but they were hired by Lucas to make his movie for him. Lucas also worked with other screenwriters, but the story and situations originated from him, and he was the final arbiter and had final cut, too. From beginning to end, they were his films and he was in control, no matter how many other people worked with him, and everybody knew that. The argument is grasping at straws.

And of course, many of the same people who hate the Special Editions will complain about how the older special effects look when the films are released on Blu-ray and other high definition formats. I've seen countless lists where people say, we want the original versions! And also, he needs to fix the lightsabers, clean up the matte lines, etc., etc.

And people like Petr Harmy, who has been making a "Despecialized" edition of the original films, are going even further to insert themselves as the editor of the films. His "Despecialized" film is actually an amalgamation of dozens of sources that he has combined to make a Frankenstein film of his own that approximates what he imagines the earlier versions to have looked like, but is even further from the original versions than anything Lucas has done.

Another interesting thing about all that is that Lucas and Lucasfilm have never attempted to stop fans from creating and illegally distributing things like the "Despecialized" edition, or the "Phantom Edit" which is supposed to "fix" *The Phantom Menace*. Lucas has always allowed these people to openly tamper with his work and distribute it to satisfy their own egos. The only thing he has ever said is that when he releases his own films with his name on them, he will release the version that he feels is best, as is his right as an artist.

So preserving the films really has nothing to do with it. What it's about is the fans feeling they should have control over how the films are presented, not Lucas. People will also say, fine he can have his versions, but he should also include the originals on the home video releases. I guess he could, and he has, but people complained that those releases weren't restored up to a high standard. So he's supposed to release a version of his movie he doesn't like, and also pay to restore it up to a high standard.

And which version? For kids that grew up on the first Special Editions, does he have an obligation to keep those in the rotation? Because there have been significant changes to those, also. What if kids who saw it in 1997 want Jabba in *Episode IV* to look like he did then, rather than when they upgraded the CGI for later releases? Damn it Lucas, you're raping their childhood memories! Does he have an obligation to release every version that people have ever seen in perpetuity, and each time restore all of them to the latest highest home video standards? You can see where this idea is ridiculous.

But the fans complaining about this stuff don't want every version, they want THEIR version. If he had just taken out the matte lines and improved the lightsabers, obviously nobody would have a word to say about this. Notice also that you don't hear anything about him releasing unaltered versions of the prequels, which had arguably bigger changes made to them after release than the original trilogy. *Phantom Menace* had a couple of whole new scenes added, along with the entire character of Yoda being replaced throughout by a CGI version. Does Lucas have an obligation to release the earlier version to "preserve film history"? No, because that's ridiculous. The sense of "obligation" that people have in this case is relative to their own emotional investment in the film, not to any sensitivity to film history.

So what it's really about isn't that there were changes, it's that there were changes that they didn't like. But are the changes actually that bad? Did Lucas somehow between 1983 and 1997 get dropped on his head, lose the part of his brain that had made these movies in the first place, and suddenly become an idiot? Or could it be that these people simply prefer the version that they saw when they were young and impressionable? Hmmmmm… Tough call.

There's the big one, of course, which is Han not "shooting first…" This change doesn't actually alter the movies any more than a dozen others, but people like to cling to it because they can say that it's not just a change to the effects, it's a change to the character and his story, and this makes it look like their concerns about the changes to the films come from their place as high minded cultural critics with a deep insight into narrative, rather than, say, their desire for the movie to always look like it did when they were six.

The thing with this change is that it's barely a change at all. Greedo was always ABOUT to shoot Han. It's there in the dialog. He means to shoot Han and kill him in every version of the scene. Han never has shot Greedo in cold blood. That scene doesn't exist except in the minds of some particular butthurt man children obsessed with a movie. So if Greedo always meant to shoot Han, the only difference is that in the altered versions he gets a shot off, and Han's actions and motivations are identical.

So then why change it? It's just a clarification. The idea that Greedo was about to shoot Han is clear from the dialog, but not as obvious visually, and as always Lucas wants these films to operate on a visual level first. Regardless of that you can say that if, functionally, Han's motivations in both versions are the same, then the clarification is unnecessary. Which is funny, because that's where the people complaining about the change prove Lucas' point for him, since it should have been clear and easy to understand before the change, but it obviously wasn't since these people, 18 years after the Special Editions came out, are still struggling to wrap their heads around it.

I suppose the other big change would be Hayden Christensen's appearance as Anakin's Force ghost. Again, people don't say that they don't like it for emotional reasons and because they don't like a prequel reference in there, they try to say that it's a bad storytelling decision and it makes no sense. Why would his ghost look like his younger self when Obi-Wan's ghost looks like Alec Guinness, etc.? In this case I'm not sure if people are being willfully obtuse, or are actually too dumb to understand something that's really simple, and explained in dialog in the film.

As Obi-Wan says, when Vader was seduced by the Dark Side, Anakin was destroyed, so when he told Luke Vader murdered Anakin, what he said was true (from a certain point of view). So Anakin's ghost, naturally, would look like he looked when he died, just as Obi-Wan and Yoda's ghosts do. It's also a nice little visual cue that he was redeemed, and he went back to who he was before he was twisted by the Dark Side, more machine than man, and all that.

A couple years ago I was dating a guy who had never seen Star Wars in his life, and so I was able to show him the films for the first time ever, and in the correct chronological order. He didn't notice almost any of the Special Edition changes, other than the obvious special effects that were beyond the technology available in 1977. One that he did notice, though, was Anakin being in *Episode VI*, since obviously Hayden Christensen wouldn't have been that age in 1983.

After the movie he asked me if it was a new shot.

I said, no, it was an old shot, but it used to be the actor who played the older version of Anakin. Curious how somebody who wasn't versed on all the "controversy" around the change would take it, I asked him, "Why do you think Lucas would want Anakin's ghost to look like that?"

My ex said, without pausing to consider it, "Well, because Anakin died when he became Darth Vader, right?"

That's how "confusing" it is, folks. Somebody who didn't know a single thing about Star Wars can figure it out in all of five seconds. And this ex-boyfriend wasn't even all that smart, if I'm being honest.

So is the fan outrage actually because it's a bad change that doesn't make sense? Or could it, just possibly, be because they don't like the prequels and it pisses them off to see a prequel actor in there? Hm, I wonder.

Like the people obsessed with how much they hate the prequels, the people who hate the Special Editions have kind of already lost. For almost 20 years of fans now, a couple whole generations, the "Special Editions" ARE the movies. If some day Disney does decide to release the "unaltered" versions, it will be as a special feature for a niche market of fans. For the poor child who has a crazy uncle who insists on them watching the "real" Star Wars, they will only be confused as to why the special effects suddenly get much worse in the middle of the series, why the Emperor is an old woman for one scene and then back to being the same actor in the next movie, and so on. You are not going to have children who say, "Ah, Greedo didn't get a shot off… Han Solo is now a completely different character, thank you crazy uncle!" That's just not going to happen.

But keep living the dream, Star Wars fans. Keep living the dream.

4- Objectively Bad

"Oh, it always hurts. It hurts a great deal. But part of making movies is you get attacked, and sometimes in very personal ways" –George Lucas [2]

The prequels and Special Editions were all huge financial successes, and generations of kids now view that as their Star Wars with no reservations. The Blu-ray set of JUST the prequel films without the original trilogy sells almost as many copies as the set of just the first three films. So how have a vocal minority of butthurt fans on the internet created the impression that their reality and their views on the films are the only ones that exist?

Lucasfilm since the Disney buyout has allowed this, because they have identified those fans as the ones they need to win over. Their new movies are already presold to everybody else, so the squeaky wheel gets the oil.

That's why we've been subjected to an endless marketing campaign about how *The Force Awakens* isn't like those other, bad Star Wars movies- it's like the ones you like! Yes you, the angry 40 year old who spends his days online endlessly talking about movies he didn't enjoy! This new movie will be just like the ones that are "objectively" better, and that, also (coincidentally!) you saw when you were six and impressionable and not 30 and angry!

Disney has played these guys like a harp, and it's funny that rather than realizing they're being played, they think they're being respected. Respect, I would say, is an artist honoring their own

instincts and doing the movie the way that is true to their inspiration, not shamelessly pandering. What an artist has to give the world is their own views, their own life experience, their own insights into the world around them. If they're just doing what the audience tells them to do, they're not giving the audience anything. They're ripping them off.

Some people really like being pandered to, though. They've lapped up all the carefully released promo clips talking about "real" sets and "practical effects", not CGI! Forget for a minute how ridiculous it is to think that *The Force Awakens* isn't brimming over with CGI- even the practical creatures were of course enhanced by CGI, had rods and supports removed in post, etc. But there's also the fact that *Phantom Menace* had more physical models built than the first three Star Wars movies combined. All three prequels had hundreds of sets and also multiple location shoots.

Like any film since about 1993, including *The Force Awakens*, they used a mixture of practical effects and CGI, depending on which was deemed best for each situation. The Geonosis arena scene, for example, was not filmed with a full set. That's because, obviously, it's impossible to build something of that scale for a movie. Any movie since the silent era, including the original three Star Wars films, would have accomplished those scenes using partially built sets and then matte paintings and special effects to complete them. Interestingly, though, the arena you see in the background of the shots, while not a full set, also wasn't CGI. It was a physical model they built.

Again, the films use whatever methods are most suitable for a given situation, which is how films are made. The difference was the emphasis placed on CGI in the discussion around the prequels because they were pushing the technology to new places, places casual film fans didn't really understand since they were new. So a lot of people came away with the idea that the entire film was done on a keyboard. That's just not actually what happened.

While people are pointing out how similar the plot of *Force Awakens* is to *A New Hope*, the common retort is that A New Hope was derivative too, of *Hidden Fortress* and *Buck Rogers*. It's actually derivative of a lot more than that- nice sized pieces of it are ripped straight out of *Dune*, for one thing. The prequels are just as much inspired by other films- Jar Jar on the battlefield accidentally dispatching enemies is pretty directly from Buster Keaton's *The General*, there are homages all over *Attack of the Clones* to everything from film noir lighting to Ray Harryhausen, and so on. These are things that Lucas wants you to notice, and that he cheerfully points out on the audio commentaries.

All of Star Wars is pastiche. What it never was before was derivative of ITSELF. Every new Star Wars episode was drastically different than the ones that preceded it. That's why all of them after the first- including *Empire*, despite revisionist history- have initially been met with a lot of resistance and negative reviews. They weren't what people expected. *The Force Awakens* is the exact opposite of that.

I should say that I actually did enjoy *The Force Awakens*, and I've seen it three times already. That doesn't mean it's perfect, however. I think the initial hugely positive reaction was largely determined months before anybody saw the thing. What they wanted was no Lucas, the original

characters, and a more serious tone. Lucasfilm listened and delivered. This movie was made to order for the fans. Fans feel that this means that they are being "respected", I would maybe use the word "exploited" instead. Star Wars used to be the work of one person, doing it how he wanted. It is now the work of a corporation, and they will use their sausage factory to turn out whatever they feel will make the most money. It's pandering, and it's calculated. Some people like that, if the reception of the 5,000 functionally identical movies Marvel Studios has puked up is any indication. But it's a mistake to think that they respect you. They respect the spending power of whatever demographic research has showed them you belong to.

But I don't think the repetition and similarities to the earlier episodes is actually the problem. As I've discussed above, repetition of key themes is an intrinsic part of Star Wars. Each trilogy is about a new generation, and each starts with a Skywalker on a desert planet, not knowing the truth about their parentage and yearning to get away and see the galaxy. That's the core of Star Wars, that's fine.

What's less fine is the ending of *Episode VI* being completely undone in an effort to get our characters back into the same situations they were in during the movies Disney has decided it would be most beneficial to emulate. There are key things repeated between the earlier episodes, but the story always moves forward.

Now we have a movie where Han Solo, who you may have thought grew during the original trilogy and learned the value of helping his friends and even became a Rebellion war hero, he's now back to exactly where he was at the start of the first movie.

I can buy that Han and Leia had a hard relationship and that whatever happened with their son would have ended it. But for Han to backslide all the way to being a smuggler and petty criminal? What, was he broke? They didn't have a prenup? This total reversal of Han's character, by the way, is glossed over by people who love this movie but scream bloody murder about how him not shooting first means that his character doesn't have an arc.

Now in *Force Awakens*, we have the Empire ostensibly defeated- except that it continues to function, and on a large enough scale that they can turn entire planets into weapons super projects. They actually seem more funded and more put together than they ever were before the defeat. We have the good guys supposedly taking back over the government, but for some reason the Rebels/Resistance are still operating from hidden bunkers. I know that there are complicated explanations for that, since I bought the Visual Dictionary and read them, but it is never made remotely clear in the film.

In the first Star Wars of course, there was no explanation for what the Empire was, or what the Rebellion was- or, for that matter, why an Empire had a Senate that it needed to answer to, or why Leia, presumably an elected official, was also a Princess. Lucas has said that this lack of information was deliberate, and that he wanted to recreate the confusion that he felt as a student first watching Kurosawa films without any knowledge of Japanese culture.

The difference is that in the case of the first film, you don't get the particulars, but it never gets in the way of you following the story. So there's an Empire, they're the bad guys. The good guys

are the Rebellion, because they're rebelling against the bad guys. That is what you need to follow and enjoy the movie, and there's never any problem getting there. The rest is flavoring that you can choose to delve into more later.

In *The Force Awakens*, on the other hand… You have no idea why the First Order is allowed to exist, no idea why the Resistance is underground, and no idea what the Republic really does, which becomes a problem when the whole thing the First Order wants to do is destroy the Republic. Why? Because, reasons? And then they do blow up the Republic Capitol- is it Coruscant? Maybe, who knows, buy the Visual Dictionary to find out I guess? And what has been accomplished? Did they just wipe out the entire government for the whole galaxy? Really? You think that might be something pertinent to tell us?

The reason they don't tell us, I would bet, is because they're afraid of bellyaching from Internet man children who feel like the prequels were irrevocably destroyed by the fact that they each have a couple minutes bothering to explain the pertinent political information. How many times in the last 16 years has somebody complained about how they had to read the word "taxation" during *Phantom Menace*, and thus had their whole childhood raped? Yes, it truly was a horrible crime against the audience.

Beyond the film refusing to give necessary information about the motivations for the organizations the characters belong to, it's equally muddy with most other things across the board.

I suppose it's vaguely hurried past that Starkiller Base can send its lasers or whatever through hyperspace and thus blow up far away planets, but it's never made very clear. The first time I watched it, when the heroes look up and see planets exploding overhead, I assumed that meant Starkiller Base must be near. Except it's a planet, can it move? Don't know, they never said. Does that mean it was nearby the whole time? Don't know, couldn't tell you. Oh wait, it's not near? OK, but apparently this whole time they were near enough to Coruscant to see it blow up with the naked eye in a daytime sky. Except, wait, that wasn't Coruscant? Oh, OK, it's just a city planet that looks exactly like Coruscant and is also the headquarters of the Senate and the heart of the Republic, like Coruscant was. But not Coruscant for some reason.

Speaking of similar planets, again, in the original movies Lucas echoed things deliberately and often, but he never had two planets that looked exactly alike. It was of paramount importance to him that the visuals would let you know where you were with a minimum of confusion.

In *The Force Awakens*, on the other hand… We have Jakku, a desert planet that looks exactly like Tatooine, but is not Tatooine. Then, due to Abrams' instance that "You guys, it's all real! Practical effects! We totally carved out the center of Mars and made Starkiller Base for reals, you guys! Man, CGI is laaaaaaame, amirite?!" we get about four other planets that all look kind of green and blue and identical to one another. We get some sort of lake planet, which looks like just some generic trees by a lake, and then we get some other planet that kind of looks like hills and trees where the rebel bunkers are, and then we get Starkiller Base, which looks generic and like forest on Earth just like the last two, except there's a little snow, and then lastly we get what

I guess is supposed to be an island planet, which looks like a green hill in the water, but you know, definitely different than the green hills and water in the other planets.

Lucas used locations, of course, but they were extreme locations that you had no problem buying as alien worlds. They were also each extremely visually distinctive, you had no problem understanding that Hoth was not Tatooine. In *The Force Awakens*, when they get to the Resistance hill planet, I wasn't even sure they had left the boring lake planet. And since, until I read the Visual Dictionary, I thought the lake planet was in orbit somehow about 100 miles from Coruscant, it seemed like the entire movie was happening in one location, and I had no idea of the relative situations of the characters.

This problem I again put at the feet of the altar of fan service. Fans bitched about the politics in the prequels, so no politics now, even when it's necessary. Fans bitched about the CGI in the prequels, so now we don't get CGI environments even when these movies have long since run out of visually distinctive shooting locations on Earth, so now the planets all basically just look like generic English countryside.

This is why you can't always listen to the fans. To re-quote Alan Moore, "If the audience knew what they needed, then they wouldn't be the audience, they would be the artists." Fans have a sort of vague feeling of dissatisfaction with the prequels because when they went they didn't magically become six years old again, and they're looking for a reason, so it's the political stuff, it's the CGI. Those aren't actually the reasons, but they're convenient targets, and now we have movies made by a corporation who hears those vague, incorrect complaints and take them to heart, and it's a blow to the movie.

But fans feel that they got what they asked for, and so they heap praise on it. That's the reason why people who criticize this movie online have been met with such anger from the superfans. I've read so many times now: Why do people have to criticize everything? Why can't you just let other people enjoy the movie? So now it's not OK to criticize Star Wars, according to the same kind of fans who created an environment where for 16 years you were not allowed to compliment certain episodes in the series without them feeling it was their duty to tell you how dumb you were and how you were an apologist.

When I went to see *Revenge of the Sith*, I made a dopey fan poster that said "Thank you, George Lucas," and the idea was that I would get the people in line to write their thanks on it, and then send it to him as a token. These were people, after all, who were camped out in tents on the sidewalk to see Lucas' next movie, so you would assume that his work had had an impact on their lives, and they must have a lot of affection for it. So I sent the poster around the line with some pens, and it came back to me graffitied by people talking about how they wanted to kill Jar Jar.

That's the way that Star Wars fans have talked about Star Wars for over a decade, but now you're a jerk if you say anything critical about the new one. What's the difference? It's because the new one was tailor made to their specifications, so if you criticize it, you're criticizing them.

This fear of angering the fans has even extended to shunning things that were part of the first Star Wars. Of course I'm speculating as to fear of the fans being the reason, but I don't see another explanation. They're terrified of their movie being seen as campy or silly, which of course Star Wars was from the start. It presented itself with an entirely straight face, but it was never afraid of embracing its pulp origins. But now, for example, the new film doesn't have wipes and dissolves to transition between scenes, as Star Wars has always had. I'm sure they were afraid touches like this looked too much like a cheap B-movie thing, which of course was the point of them.

More importantly, they're afraid of echoing anything that fans have criticized, even when an echo is appropriate. In the first Star Wars, Luke watches as Obi-Wan is killed by Darth Vader, and in *Phantom Menace* Obi-Wan watches as Qui-Gon is killed by Darth Maul. Both times the characters react with the same scream of "No!" In this new film, Rey, Finn, and Chewbacca watch as Kylo Ren kills Han Solo, and it obviously meant to be an echo of the previous two moments where the new hero is sent on their journey by watching the murder of their mentor. I like this. As I've discussed above these echoes are key to the generational nature of the entire saga. Except, nobody screams, "No!"

A little detail? Sure. But not including it is a very un-Star Wars choice. It still wouldn't be such a big deal, except that the reason for not including it seems obvious- fans have so roundly mocked the "No!" moments in *Revenge of the Sith* and the latest version of *Return of the Jedi*. This is a classic example of the fans changing and growing older, but thinking that it's the films who changed, not them- the "No!" was always in Star Wars, fans just started finding it silly when they got too old for it. It bothers me to have creative decisions made with that type of fan mindset being the motivation. Star Wars should not be ashamed of what it is.

And again, I liked *The Force Awakens*, but I think we should talk about what the movie actually is, as opposed to the fever dream of reclaimed childhoods people are trying to act like it was.

Let's just go into one example, although there are several like this… R2-D2 waking up and having the rest of the map. When I saw the movie, this didn't bother me much, because I figured it was meant to be a mystery, and there must be a good explanation for it later. Maybe Luke had deliberately given R2 the information, and he had chosen to remotely activate him at that time, because he knew it was time to come back. Or, you know, something.

Then, JJ Abrams **gave his answer to Entertainment Weekly**. You can read the article, but the gist of it is, Artoo had the map because in the first movie he plugged into the Death Star computer and saved the Imperial database, and then he wakes up at the end of the movie because BB-8 asked him about the map earlier, and it just took him a while to respond.

No really, that's the explanation.

So apparently, on the Death Star, any droid without any authorization that plugged into any data port could have access to every piece of information that the Empire had. None of this was compartmentalized or encrypted in any way, basically just if you plugged your iPhone in to charge over near Judy's HR desk, you would have access to All The Information Ever Recorded

About Everything. This is also the only copy of All The Information, because by the time of *Force Awakens* Artoo has maps of things that apparently nobody else in the galaxy has.

This is a galaxy where hyperspace travel allows them to cross the entire galaxy within weeks, but nobody has a map of any of the stars in the partial map that BB-8 brings showing Luke's location. There WAS a map, of course, but the Empire only had the one copy, and they put it on an under construction weapons station that I guess had no wireless access. This wasn't just All The Information that the Empire had either, apparently, because it also seems to have information about secret Jedi temples, so we can assume it was also the whole Jedi library, unless they just stored this one piece on the Death Star in case any stray Rebel droids felt like looking it up.

So you're R2-D2 on the first Death Star, and you plug in, and you apparently have access to All The Information. And he just decides to download all this shit, because you never know- that farm boy they just picked up could one day turn out to be the last Jedi, and then have a school for all the new Jedi, and then that smuggler they just met and the Princess they're trying to rescue could have a kid, and that kid is Force sensitive too and so the farm boy is training him at his Jedi school and then the kid goes evil and kills all the new Jedi and then the farm boy is filled with regret and decides he needs a secret place to hide and he needs to find the first Jedi temple. I mean, you can't know that that's what's going to happen, but it makes sense that Artoo would want to prepare for such an eventuality, right?

So Artoo downloads and saves All The Information (But nothing else that he found in his survey of all recorded history ever turns out to be pertinent other than that one Jedi temple bit, so it's not mentioned. Maybe a bit of a waste of hard disk space, but who's to say).

So fine Artoo has this information and they need it. The whole plot of the movie is that the Resistance and the First Order need this information and they must find it, because reasons. That's the entire story of the entire movie, them finding this. So, how do they retrieve the information from Artoo? What exciting adventures must they go on to repair him and find Luke? Well, he just sort of turns on one day. And then, you know, he shows them and stuff. Yay! Victory! Now that's a story, eh?

I'll compare it to *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, since the people who love this movie have such a Lawrence Kasdan boner. This is the equivalent of if the Ark of the Covenant- that movie's MacGuffin, as Luke Skywalker is this movie's MacGuffin- just turned out at the end of Raiders to have been sitting in Marcus Brody's office the whole time. Maybe it was, like, hidden in a corner of Brody's office? No, actually it was just sitting on the desk. Why didn't he find it until the end of the movie, then? Well, because it wasn't the end of the movie yet. You can't find the MacGuffin until the end, so the Ark just was in a "droid coma" until the people for the next showing started to line up and buy popcorn.

I mean, come on. Let's just be honest. This is some next level stupid shit.

Moments like these, though, are actually the only time that I feel the touch of JJ the auteur. What's something else as dumb as this in another recent major movie? Hm, I'm remembering

something about tribbles containing the secret to immortality and thus making every character in your film series invincible because, why? I guess because tribbles are cute or something, so it seemed like a good idea?

This is the movie that *The Force Awakens* actually is. It's also a movie with some snappy dialog, a lot of fun scenes, a lot of very forgettable scenes, some great performances, some sure, whatever, it's good enough performances, and I'm sure I'll probably see it a fourth time and a fifth. I kind of like Star Wars.

But I will always think that Star Wars was much more interesting- and also much more literate and ambitious- when it was the vision of one particular quirky genius who had the courage, in the face of massive fan opposition, to stick to his guns and make his movies the way he wanted to make them.

Notes

1. From a 1999 *60 Minutes* interview, a clip of which was used in *The Beginning* documentary, available on the *Phantom Menace* DVD.
2. *60 Minutes* interview, 2005
3. *Star Wars Insider* #60
4. Lucas' speech to Congress on March 3, 1988
5. *Wired* magazine 7.05 -Incidentally, this quote is why I think that all the rumors about Disney now releasing the original versions of the first trilogy are wishful thinking. I find it very unlikely that, when Lucas sold his company to them, he wouldn't have had some stipulation in place about how his work would be preserved and presented in the future. The right to have control over the final cut of his work was the motivating factor for practically his entire career. However, if they do have the right to release other versions of the films, it will obviously only be as a special feature or as a small release for a niche market. The Special Editions are the films now, and it will stay that way.